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The impact of religious faith on family planning in South Korea

Introduction

According to W. Świątkiewicz (1998: 10): *“Family is the most important, and, at the same time, the smallest particle of social life.”* Currently, the social reality of many countries features many kinds of families, from a family established in a traditional manner by concluding marriage to alternative forms such as: cohabitation relationship (Kwak 2005; Slany 2006; Juszczuk-Frelkiewicz 2014) both heterosexual and homosexual (Merin 2002), homosexual marriage (Cahill 2004) and reconstructed families (Kwak 2000: 78–99; Jundziłł 2006: 305–313) (the so-called *patchwork family*) (Kowalska 2007: 78–80). The scale of presence and legal possibility of establishing these kinds of families depends on what forms of alternative relationships are legally acknowledged in a given country. They also depend on the dominant religious denomination, secularization, individualization, autonomization, industrialization, IT introduction, social allowance, social tolerance and acceptance towards alternative lifestyles. The preferred type of establishing a family and right age for concluding marriage depend on many socio-cultural determinants, personal preferences and life situation.

According to Y. Xinzhong (2009: 36): *“Along with Confucianism (beginning of the ruling of the Li dynasty – Joseon state 1392–1910), Korea witnessed a change in the perception of a woman. Initially, since the ideas of Confucianism first reached higher circles, the restrictions covered only this layer, however, with time they spread to the entire society. Three Cardinal Guides (san gang) and Five Constants (wu chang), being the essence of the functioning of Confucianism-based states, became ever since a determinant of lifestyle and principles prevailing among Ko-*

reans. According to Three Cardinal Guides, the subject reports to the ruler, the son to the father, and the wife to the husband (very clear indication of the hierarchy of interrelations and place of the woman in the society – the man is the ruler, the father and the husband). Five Constants refer to five Confucian virtues: humanity (ren), moral sense (yi), ritual (li), wisdom (zhi) and faithfulness (xin).

The closed world of Korean women was opened slightly with the arrival of Christianity to Korea (17th century). Women brought up in accordance with Confucian ideas that convey female subordination, learned about the words claiming that all are equal towards God. Although accepting Christianity was severely penalized, many female representatives decided to accept a new religion. Certainly, Christianity did not have much of a chance to conquer Korea and change the people's mentality, but it foreshadowed what the subsequent centuries were about to bring (Ogarek-Czój 2008: 107; Grabowska 2015: 7).

According to I.H. Park, L.J. Cho, the Korean family is one in the centre of which there is a child, rather than a couple forming the family (Park, Cho 1995: 117–134). Married couples are to fulfil the procreative function to uphold the family line. According to Confucianism, the bond between parents and children plays a crucial role for the Korean family. Parents are expected to dedicate energy, time and money to raise and educate their children. The bonds between parents and children are the strongest when children conclude marriage, because children (as young family members) often support their ageing parents. Filial piety, family hierarchy and strong bonds between generations are the most important values prevailing in Korea (Yang, Rettig 2003: 349–370).

Confucian values are strongly instilled in the society, reinforced by families, schools, dominant in films and television, in the mass media, and religious institutions. These values remain a significant force in the society. For instance, care homes or life-supporting facilities are sparse in South Korea, because younger family members can provide care for their senior family members and it would be a disgrace for older family members not to benefit from aid and support of their younger relatives. Despite the dominance of Confucianism in the Korean value system, the younger generation of Koreans believes that Confucianism is outdated, in spite of the fact that they respect their older relatives who are rooted in the Confucian values. At the same time, many women from South Korea believe that Confucianism imposes patriarchal values which are unacceptable so they resist them (Duncan 2002: 431–462). K.J. Hyun (2001: 203–226) presented research whose results show that young women aged between 24 and 36 were clearly less enthusiastic towards the Confucian values. Moreover, J.B. Duncan (2002: 431–462) pointed out that Korean women from all age categories are critical towards the Korean version of Confucianism that rigidly rationalizes the patriarchal and social values.

The post-war years in South Korea brought along the Americanisation of lifestyle, which, however, did not oust the strongly rooted Confucian tradition.

The pillars of Confucianism are too strongly embedded in the social tissue to be easily destroyed. Strong hierarchization is visible in every aspect of life, and the role of the woman who finally has some freedom, is, however, limited. Indeed, education is available for all regardless of sex, however, woman's professional career usually ends with her getting married (marriage is the woman's purpose). Marriage in contemporary Korea, like ages ago, is rarely a match based on love. Most marriages are arranged and constitute a form of agreement between families willing to strengthen their position. The young only sporadically oppose the will of their parents (Grabowska 2015: 8).

Through the rise of modernisation and individualisation, cohabitation has become increasingly popular in Korea as a form of "transformation of intimacy" – according to A. Giddens (1992), especially since the 1990s (see Ham Inhee 2002, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 15). Such relationships are usually called "혼전동거" or "premarital cohabitation" in Korea, rather than just "cohabitation" because marriage is still the normative relation that must be achieved to attain "adult citizenship" (see Josephson 2005, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 15). There are several kinds of cohabitation in Korea, such as "remarriage cohabitation" and "elderly marriage cohabitation" as well as "premarital cohabitation." These relations may be common-law marriage relations or not, depending on the cohabiters' intentions regarding their relationships. Park Kyoungjae (2013, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 15) argues that those who are in a cohabiting relationship without a plan to marry but rather want to remain cohabiting, need to be understood as being in a "voluntarily de facto marriage" (see also Kim Hyesook 1989, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 15). This should be distinguished from the traditional common-law marriage.

Yet, cohabitation is still a taboo in Korea. In the survey (Panelnow 2014, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 16) that asked about unmarried men's and women's premarital cohabitation, about 70% of the participants appeared to be concerned about cohabiting before marriage because of the negative social attitudes towards cohabitation (27.66%), the difficulties when cohabitation breaks down before marriage (12.76%), the emphasis on sexual pleasure in cohabitation (10.98%), the social stigma for women when they become pregnant while cohabiting (9.82%) and because cohabitation seems less committed than marriage (8.63%). This survey shows that many young people care about how they are seen by others once they start cohabiting (before marriage) and when it is revealed. The greatest worry was the negative social attitudes towards cohabitation (27.66% of the participants).

In the light of the sexual double standard, cohabitation tends to be considered opting for sexual freedom and this viewpoint particularly stigmatizes (heterosexual) women because they are assumed to have sexual relations with their male cohabitee (Park Eunjo 2002, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015). This in turn means that they have lost their virginity and are thus classed as loose women.

What is problematic here, as already indicated, is that the same judgment on sexuality and ethics is not applied to men, but only to women (Won Mihye 2011, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18).

Overall, there is a discrepancy between the actuality that cohabitation has become popular and the negative social views of cohabitation. This contradiction is revealed in a number of other surveys and statistics. For example, in 2013 the Korean Institution for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) showed that 46.1% of its survey respondents said that cohabitation without marriage was acceptable (see Kim Seungkwon et al. 2013, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18). Also, KOSIS (2014a, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18) reports that approximately 62.1% of Korean adults aged 20 to 39 were in favour of premarital cohabitation. However, another survey shows that 61.22% of 7,786 respondents were concerned about negative attitudes towards cohabitation, and particularly 9.82% of them said that the stigma for cohabiting women was too serious to be overcome (Panelnow 2014, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18). These surveys and statistics indicate that whilst young people desire cohabitation, a significant proportion is afraid, or at least aware, of the stigma attached to it.

Despite these negative attitudes to cohabitation, the numbers of people living with their girl/boyfriend without being married are growing. Ham Inhee (2002, follow: Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18) and many others point out that one of the key reasons for the growing number of (young) cohabiters is the patriarchal underpinning of marriage and family in Korea.

Conducted research on cohabitation points to the fact that this social phenomenon has just begun to be accepted as a form of life, and more and more people arrange their lives in cohabitation even in Korea.

Methodological foundations of the conducted research

The article is based on the research conducted among the students of the Korean University of Foreign Studies in Seoul in South Korea in 2014. The empirical research covered a research sample of 104 students. The main research tool used in the research was a survey questionnaire (Gruszczyński 1999) containing 43 questions. The collected research material underwent statistical analysis in SPSS software.

Students constitute a very important sociological category and so are their opinions, particularly when family life is discussed. First of all, they are the pattern-forming layer (group of comparative reference) for generations of their peers. Secondly, students are under the strongest pressure of the post-modern culture and its individual patterns of self-fulfilment. Also in this social environ-

ment future plans concerning selection of the form of marriage, family life, and formulated opinions on the importance of family life in the contemporary world strictly involve the most recent forms of family forming, partner bonds, and directions for development of the phenomenon of cohabitation.

The surveyed students were different in terms of religious denomination. A considerable percentage of the surveyed are also atheists, who do not believe in God (48.1%). Every fourth surveyed person is protestant (25.0%). Slightly more than 17% of the surveyed were Christians and almost 10% profess Buddhism (see: data in Table 1). The research sample did not include students following the philosophical and religious system being Confucianism.

Table 1. Religious denomination vs. sex

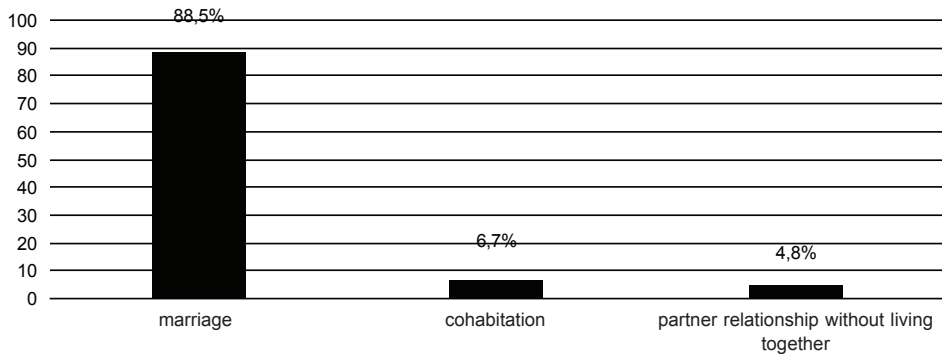
Religion	Sex				Total	
	Woman		Man			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Christianity	14	22.2	4	9.8	18	17.3
Buddhism	4	6.3	6	14.6	10	9.6
Protestantism	15	23.8	11	26.8	26	25.0
Atheism	30	47.6	20	48.8	50	48.1
Total	63	100.0	41	100.0	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

Family in life plans of the Korean students

The respondents going through the survey questionnaire were asked about the following: which model of family life do they prefer? Do you intend to conclude marriage in the future and do you plan to have children in the future? The statistical analysis of the hypotheses related to these questions will show the plans of the surveyed group in the sphere of future family life, and, above all, whether or not the diversity of religions professed by the respondents or lack of faith has any impact on family planning.

The statistical analysis of the received survey results of students, as a social group, proved that the vast majority of students from South Korea (88.5%) preferred marriage as a relationship for life. Only nearly 7% of the respondents preferred life in cohabitation relationship, and less than 5% of the surveyed declared living in the future in a partner relationship without living together (see: Figure 1).

Figure 1. Preferred life model

Source: author's own research

The sex of the surveyed respondents did not differentiate the preferences of future life models in a statistically significant manner $p > 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 1.271$; $p = 0.530$; $V = 0.111$). Roughly the same percentage of women (85.7%) and men (92.7%) preferred marriage. In spite of that, it can be emphasized that 7 percentage points more men than women preferred marriage, which may indicate that men were slightly more traditional in the selection of life model than women who, in turn, slightly more often opted for informal family models. Almost 8% of women preferred life without marriage in cohabitation relationship, and partner relationship without living together was indicated by 6.3% of the surveyed women. Men slightly less frequently preferred informal family models – almost 5% of the men want to create in the future a relationship based on cohabitation, and less than 2.5 % want a partner relationship (see: Table 2). This gender gap may stem from the patriarchal structure of the Korean family system. Park Yongjoo (2014) argues that men can get a “premium on marriage” whereas women may receive a “penalty on marriage” because men turn out to concentrate more on their work and thus earn more after marriage thanks to their wives’ support, given that married women are required to do the housework and commit to childcare. Consequently, women are more reluctant to marry than men (Hwajeong Yoo 2015: 18).

Table 2. Preferred life model vs. sex

Sex	Type of relationship						Total	
	Marriage		Cohabitation (living without marriage)		Partner relationship without living together			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Woman	54	85.7	5	7.9	4	6.3	63	100.0
Man	38	92.7	2	4.9	1	2.4	41	100.0
Total	92	88.5	7	6.7	5	4.8	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

Religious denomination and lack of faith of the surveyed present statistically significant indications for the preferred life model – $p < 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 13.151$; $p = 0.041$; $V = 0.356$). The conducted analysis of the research findings shows that atheists more often prefer living in marriage (96.0%), than Buddhists (80.0%), protestants (80.8%) and Christians (83.3%). On the other hand, no atheists (0%) want to live in the future in a cohabitation relationship without living together in one household. Nearly 8% of protestants, 20% of Buddhists and nearly 17% of Christians prefer life without marriage in cohabitation as the most suitable model of their future relationship. Every tenth protestant wants to create a partner relationship, but be independent and live on their own: this model was not indicated by any Buddhist or Christian (see Table 3).

Table 3. Preferred life model vs religious denomination

Religion	Type of relationship						Total	
	Marriage		Cohabitation (living without marriage)		Partner relationship without living together			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Christianity	15	83.3	3	16.7	0	0.0	18	100.0
Buddhism	8	80.0	2	20.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
Protestantism	21	80.8	2	7.7	3	11.5	26	100.0
Atheism	48	96.0	0	0.0	2	4.0	50	100.0
Total	92	88.5	7	6.7	5	4.8	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

The surveyed students were also asked in the questionnaire whether they intend to conclude marriage in the future. The question was a control one, indicating whether preferences concerning life model indicated by students were truly conceding with real plans for the future related to concluding marriage.

From the analysis of the conducted research it can be concluded that the generally preferred life model, which is marriage, mostly does coincide with the future plans of the young Koreans related to relationships. Exactly 88.5% of the respondents pointed out that they prefer the institution of marriage, and 83.7% of the respondents plan concluding marriage in the future. However, attention should be paid to the fact that men were distinctly more willing to marry in the future (definitely yes: 43.9%; yes: 51.2%) than women (definitely yes: 38.1%; yes: 38.1%). Almost 16% of women did not have opinion on this matter. On the other hand, less than 8% of women do not intend to get married as compared to men whose percentage oscillated around 2.4%. However, occurring differences between sex are not statistically significant due to the domination of women over men in the sample research – $p > 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 8.131$; $p = 0.087$; $V = 0.280$) (see: Table 4).

Table 4. Plans concerning concluding marriage in the future vs. sex

Do you intend to get married in the future?	Sex				Total	
	Woman		Man			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely yes	24	38.1	18	43.9	42	40.4
Yes	24	38.1	21	51.2	45	43.3
I do not have an opinion	10	15.9	1	2.4	11	10.6
No	4	6.3	0	0.0	4	3.8
Definitely no	1	1.6	1	2.4	2	1.9
Total	63	100.0	41	100.0	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

The professed religion or lack of faith in God by the surveyed students do not differentiate in a statistically significant manner their plans concerning concluding marriage in the future – $p > 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 13.990$; $p = 0.301$; $V=0.212$). Regardless of religion or a lack thereof (atheism), the vast majority of the surveyed plan to build a family based on marriage (see: Table 5).

Table 5. Plans concerning concluding marriage in the future and religion

Do you intend to get married in the future?	Religion								Total	
	Christianity		Buddhism		Protestantism		Atheism			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	11	61.1	5	50.0	7	26.9	19	38.0	42	40.4
Yes	5	27.8	5	50.0	13	50.0	22	44.0	45	43.3
I do not have an opinion	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	11.5	8	16.0	11	10.6
No	1	5.6	0	0.0	2	7.7	1	2.0	4	3.8
Definitely no	1	5.6	0	0.0	1	3.8	0	0.0	2	1.9
Total	18	100.1	10	100.0	26	100.0	50	100.0	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

Sex of the surveyed respondents differentiates, in a statistically significant manner, their plans concerning having children in the future – $p < 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 8.168$; $p = 0.017$; $V = 0.280$). Men declared definitely more often (85.4%) than women (60.3%) that they plan having children in the future. Slightly more than 6% of the women do not have children in their future plans. On the other hand, every third woman (33.3%) did not have a definite opinion on this matter. When conducting the survey, almost 15% of the men did not know whether or not they plan having children in the future (see: Table 6).

The occurring differences based on sex may be justified by a growing willingness of women in South Korea to be self-fulfilled, have higher education and succeed in professional life. According to the Korean tradition and the axionormative system, women may get educated and succeed in professional life, however, at the expense of establishing that smallest particle of social life, namely the family. A woman who is professionally fulfilled and then concludes marriage and opts for maternity usually resigns from her career, takes care of the house and brings up the children.

According to the data of the Korean Statistical Information Service (2014), at present the greatest number of women giving birth is aged between 30 and 34 – in 2014, the number of women giving birth was almost 108,000. On the other hand, in lower age categories: between 25 and 29, this number was almost 47,000, and in the age category between 20 and 24, this number was only 10,000. As compared to 1985, the situation was precisely reverse. In the 1980s and 1990s, the greatest number of women giving birth was in the age groups between 25 and 29 (150,000) and 20 and 24 (118,000). Therefore, in the period of these several decades, transformations occurred towards downward trends of fertility among Korean women and decision on having children at a later age. The same trends are observed in many European countries and in the United States, where the processes of secularization and individualization support liberal, libertarian and autonomy-centred value systems.

Table 6. Plans concerning having children in the future vs sex

Do you plan having children in the future (even if you already have a child/children)?	Sex				Total	
	Woman		Man			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	38	60.3	35	85.4	73	70.2
No	4	6.3	0	0.0	4	3.8
I don't know yet	21	33.3	6	14.6	27	26.0
Total	63	100.0	41	100.0	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

Even in this case, particular religious denominations or lack of faith in God among the surveyed respondents do not differentiate in a statistically significant manner the decisions of the surveyed social group on having children in the future – $p > 0.05$ (test $\chi^2 = 5.103$; $p = 0.531$; $V=0.157$). The surveyed who were the most determined to have children were Christians (88.9%), then Buddhists (70.0%), whereas Protestants (65.4%) and atheists (66.0%) were least decided. Atheists (30.0%), Buddhists (30.0%) as well as Protestants (26.9%) were not decided yet in this matter (see: Table 7).

Table 7. Plans concerning having children in the future and religious denomination

Do you plan having children in the future (even if you already have a child/children)?	Religion								Total	
	Christianity		Buddhism		Protestantism		Atheism			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	16	88.9	7	70.0	17	65.4	33	66.0	73	70.2
No	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	7.7	2	4.0	4	3.8
I don't know yet	2	11.1	3	30.0	7	26.9	15	30.0	27	26.0
Total	18	100.0	10	100.0	26	100.0	50	100.0	104	100.0

Source: author's own research

Conclusions

The empirical research conducted among the students of the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea indicated that the life model preferred by the students, which is marriage, mostly coincides with the young Koreans' future plans related to this institution. The vast majority of the respondents will conclude marriage in the future and, in this way, will create the smallest and the most important social group, namely the family. The statistical analysis indicated that only in one case the professed religion or lack of faith in God differentiated the respondents in a statistically significant manner (though at a low level of statistical significance – $p = 0.041$) the students' preferences as to the form of family life. These differences were manifesting themselves in a definitely greater percentage of atheists (96.0%) who preferred family life in a marriage when compared with the believers. The vast majority of the surveyed also planned to have children in the future. The professed religion or its lack in this case did not differentiate indications in a statistically significant manner. However, it should be emphasized that almost every third Buddhist, protestant and atheist did not have an opinion on this matter.

The empirical research proved that the surveyed students attach importance to starting a family and concluding marriage and the vast majority of the surveyed in the future wishes to spend their personal life in marriage and have children. It can be concluded from the research that the surveyed students, regardless of a professed religion or its lack, had a pro-family attitude: they want to start a family in a traditional manner, namely in the form of marriage. However, it should be emphasized that men were slightly more decisive in this matter and their preferences were to a greater extent determined by the recognized traditional values. When analysing the indications and preferences of women in terms

of their preferred relationship and children, it should be concluded that they are determined also by traditional shared values, however, it should be noted that answers of some women show the impact of liberalism, as well as libertarian and self-fulfilment values. It can be supported for example by pointing to the almost 1/3 of the surveyed women without any opinion on having children and the larger percentage of women (than men) without any opinion as to willingness to conclude marriage in the future. The reasons of women's hesitation in the issues related to the family – form of relationship to live personal life in (marriage or cohabitation) and whether to have any relationship at all, as well as whether to have children – can be traced back to the diffusion of the liberal (libertarian and self-fulfilment agenda) values particularly from the United States as well as from the Western Europe. However, the analysed process of social life liberalization shows small dynamics owing to the dominant relations of the Korean women with the inhabitants of South-Eastern Asia professing traditional values, religious influences in their own country, a strong impact of parents and a low level of diffusion of liberal values. Liberal values are more evident in mixed marriages or relationships: Korean-European or Korean-American relationships or marriages, which, over ten years ago, were not accepted by Korean parents or local communities.

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